



**Testimony of Congressman Denny Rehberg (MT-At Large)**  
Opposing the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act  
Tuesday, May 05, 2009  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands



Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, thanks for allowing me to return to the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands to testify again on behalf of the people of Montana.

I'm here representing county commissioners, state representatives, ranchers, timber workers, sportsmen and women and recreationalists who have expressed their opposition to the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act in letters, faxes, emails, survey responses and even a rapidly growing Facebook group. All told, I've heard from almost 10,000 folks who live in the Northern Rockies – who consider the land at issue in the legislation we are discussing today to be their home. It's where they live, work and raise a family.

I'm here to report that more than 96% of us who live in these areas oppose this bill. In my years of public service – beginning in the state legislature, then as Montana's Lieutenant Governor and now as the sole Representative in the House, I can think of few subjects that have evoked such a unified opposition.

If Congress wants to, it can ignore these concerns and pass NREPA without their consent and without a single vote from any of their Congressional Representatives. The land NREPA federalizes is represented by only 7 Members of Congress including myself; far fewer than the 72 current cosponsors of the bill. Congress can just say it's inconvenient that none of those 72 cosponsors are from the districts that NREPA impacts.

Recently, Congress passed the Omnibus Lands Act, which created over 2 million acres of new wilderness, this bill carves out more than 24 million acres of new wilderness. That area is larger than any of the districts represented by the 72 cosponsors of the bill. In fact, out of 435 Congressional Districts, only 18 are larger. Representative Carolyn Maloney – who is the lead sponsor of this bill – could fit her New York district into the new wilderness created by NREPA almost 3,000 times.

And while you may have the votes to force your will on the people who live in the Northern Rockies, I'm here to tell you that doing so isn't in anyone's best interest. Not the folks who live on this land, and not the people you were elected to represent. It's not even in the best interest of the ecosystems we all want to protect.

Let me be absolutely clear about something. The folks I represent support responsible land conservation. Currently, there are more than 30 million acres of state and federal land in Montana alone - that's nearly one acre in every three. As a state where lifestyles and livelihoods depend on the land we live upon, it's one of our top priorities. And we do an outstanding job.

To manage these lands, stake-holders come to the table and formulate consensus-driven solutions at the local level. The federal government could learn a lot from examples in my state that center around three words: cooperation, trust and consensus. For example, the Undaunted Stewardship approach demonstrates the ability of farm and ranch families to contribute to the preservation of open space and scenic beauty while continuing to use the land for productive purposes.

For the Montanans who work, till, graze, hunt, fish, hike, camp and enjoy this land, conservation is not only a daily personal choice; it's our way of life. Real conservation isn't about making tough decisions for someone else who lives thousands of miles away, yet that's exactly what NREPA does.

The workable solutions we need won't come from Washington, D.C.; we need to reach a balance that truly reflects Montana not the ideals of powerful special interests.

From Washington, D.C., it's impossible to smell the toxic smoke from hundreds of raging wildfires that will be harder to fight if NREPA passes.

From Washington, D.C., it's impossible to see the 1.6 million-plus acres of dead and dying trees that result from pine beetle infestations that will be more difficult to manage if NREPA passes.

From Washington, D.C., you can't watch a hillside change colors as indigenous plants are slowly strangled out of existence by toxic weeds that are impossible to fight once NREPA passes.

From Washington, D.C., you can't hear the frustration in the voice of a hunter or angler who can no longer get to the secluded mountain ridge where his family has gone for generations once NREPA passes.

From Washington, D.C., you can't walk on the overgrazed lands once managed by ranchers who can no longer take their open range livestock to new pastures once NREPA passes.

From Washington, D.C., Congress pushes for alternative energy from wind and the sun. But how can we get that power, and create green jobs in the process, if we can't build transmission grids across our lands once NREPA passes?

And there's a new concern looming in the minds of the folks around Montana and the country. There aren't many things folks in the Northern Rockies care more about than their Second Amendment rights. Bills like NREPA create more federally controlled land, but they don't guarantee Second Amendment rights on that land. The recent decision to eliminate Second Amendment Rights on some federal lands is nothing more than back-door gun control, and it's not hard to imagine wilderness as the next target for restricted gun access. I'm concerned that NREPA has no guarantees that the federal government won't someday ban guns on other federal lands the way it just did in National Parks.

At the end of the day, this is about Washington, D.C. thinking it knows how to manage the Northern Rockies better than the people who live there. I'm here to say this isn't the case.

Many of Representative Maloney's constituents in New York's 14<sup>th</sup> District undoubtedly find Central Park a welcome refuge from the urban surroundings of America's most crowded city. A Montanan who visited Central Park recently shared an observation with me: Although Central Park was free of buildings and streets, many of the open spaces were cordoned off by fences. Visitors could walk or run on centrally planned pathways, but the fields of grass around them were off limits. NREPA models its philosophy for 24 million acres of land after the approach taken in the 843 acres of Central Park. Look, but don't touch.

This approach may work in Manhattan, New York, but it doesn't work in Manhattan, Montana. I can't stress how crucial that distinction is, and that's why I oppose this bill.